

## "THE CORNER STONE."

Address Delivered Before the Masonic Grand Lodge, at Vinita, by Henry M. Furman, Grand Orator.

Brethren of the Grand Lodge of the Indian Territory: The custom of laying the corner stone is one of the most interesting and instructive ceremonies practiced by mankind. It is interesting on account of its antiquity. It has existed for so long a time that neither history nor tradition can tell when it was first instituted. The fact that it has been handed down to us from unknown generations and that it has been observed and performed in the dead languages of dim and distant past proves that it must have much that is good and true about it; otherwise, it would long since have perished and been numbered among the forgotten dead.

The earliest reference to this custom is found in that grand light in Masonry—the Holy Bible. In the 36th chapter of the book of Job, beginning with the first verse, we find this language: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up thy loins like a man for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the world? Declare, if thou hast understanding, who laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest; or who hath stretched the line upon it. Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the cornerstone thereof?"

The evident purpose and meaning of this passage of scripture is to teach how absurd it is for man, the creature, to question the works of God, the Creator; for the finite to attempt to measure the infinite. Any such attempt "darkeneth counsel by words, without knowledge." But this passage of scripture also proves beyond dispute that the ceremony of laying the corner stone was practiced and well understood in the days of Job.

The Bible is the inestimable gift from God to man, as a rule and guide of our faith and practice in life. It guides us to all truth; it directs our paths to the temple of happiness, and points out the whole duty of man. No idle or meaningless language is found upon its sacred pages. The great truths which it teaches and the illustrations which it presents are such as can be easily understood by the people to whom it is addressed.

The custom of laying a corner stone must have been practiced in the days of Job and commonly understood by the people, or it never would have

been referred to by the Lord as an illustration of a truth which he desired the people to understand. If the ceremony of laying the corner stone was practiced in the days of Job, then the fraternity of Freemasons must also have existed at that time, because it is a Masonic ceremony. No other society or fraternity except the Masons can or has ever attempted to explain its symbolic meaning.

There are other passages of scripture referring to the corner stone which I shall quote directly. When they are considered in connection with the Masonic explanation of the symbolism of the corner stone, it will be found that this explanation not only harmonizes with but explains the true meaning of these passages of scripture, and that it gives an additional force and meaning to them which would not be fully seen or understood without the explanation which Masonry gives.

Taken altogether, it is too clear for argument that the corner stone ceremony frequently referred to in the Bible is identical with the ceremony which has always been practiced by the Masonic fraternity.

In the 14th Psalm, 11th and 12th verses, David uses this language: "Rid me and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and whose right hand is a hand of wickedness, that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace." Here we find the very soul of poetry taking one of the symbols of Masonry and with it paying a true and beautiful compliment to woman. She is indeed the precious corner stone upon which rests the superstructure of our social fabric and from which radiate those powerful, purifying and ennobling influences which have civilized and refined the world. Without her sweet and gentle influence this world, with all its boasted wealth, culture and power, would speedily lapse into barbarism. A low regard for her is like ashes from the furnace of hell; it destroys all that is pure and noble and sinks men down to infamy and death. A high regard for her is like fire taken from the altar of heaven; it purifies and ennobles and lifts man up and makes him nearer to and more like his God. She is the embodiment of purity, devotion and love, the climax of God's creation. David must have understood the Masonic explanation of the corner stone; he beautifully expresses it with regard to the position of woman in the moral and social world.

In the 16th verse of the 28th chapter of Isaiah we find this language: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious

corner stone—a sure foundation. He that believeth shall not make haste." Mark well the language used. The corner stone is a tried stone, a precious stone, and a sure foundation. It is a stone of such great importance that it is referred to as symbolical of the promised deliverer of God's chosen people. Bear these things in mind and see how they harmonize with the Masonic explanation of the corner stone. Isaiah must have had this explanation in mind when he used this language. He was taking the ceremony of the corner stone and with it attempting to give the people an idea of what the Messiah was to be. The illustration was exceedingly appropriate. The most important ceremony practiced by mankind was selected to illustrate the most important event that was to happen in the history of the world. By this means the mission of the Messiah was brought within the comprehension of the people; they knew the meaning of the ceremony of the laying of the corner stone. From their knowledge of this ceremony they could not misunderstand the language of Isaiah. When you have heard the Masonic explanation of the corner stone you will see that the harmony of the illustration is one of surpassing beauty.

In the 19th and 20th verses of the 2d chapter of Ephesians St. Paul says: "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

Masonic tradition informs us that both St. John the Baptist and St. John, the evangelist, were members of our order. As a tribute of respect to their memory, Masonic lodges are dedicated to the holy Saints John.

Prior to Christ Masonic lodges from the building of the temple had been dedicated to King Solomon; but since the Christian era they are dedicated to the St. John the Baptist and St. John, the evangelist, as all well informed Masons know.

From the language used by St. Paul I am satisfied that if he was not a Mason, then the symbolism of the corner stone must have been known to him.

Let us now compare these verses of scripture with the true meaning of the Masonic ceremony of laying the corner stone.

In the first place, it was the invariable custom of our ancient brethren to lay the corner stone in the northeast corner of the building. This was not the result of chance or caprice, but it was based upon good and sufficient reasons, such as Masons are always able to give for everything that they do.

The position of the corner stone teaches a great symbolic

lesson; one which all men in all ages should not only learn, but which cannot be too deeply impressed upon the human mind. In ancient days the North was not only the region of desolation and death, as it is now, but it was also involved in the most dense, intellectual and moral darkness. The hordes of barbarians who endeavored to stamp out and destroy early civilization all came from towards the north, therefore Masonry taught that the North was the place of darkness. Exactly the opposite conditions existed in the East. Creation began in the East; the garden of Eden was in the East; the sun rises in the East. All civilization and all religion at that time existed in the East. Ancient writings are full of allusions to the Wise Men from the East. For these reasons Masonry taught that the East was the place of light. The corner stone was placed in the northeast corner of the building in order that it might be between the North, the place of darkness, and the East, the place of light, as a symbol to teach men and Masons that it was their duty to strive continually to pass from darkness to light; from ignorance to knowledge; from vice to virtue. Compare this with the language of Isaiah when he prophesied that the Messiah would be a precious corner stone, the people knew what position the corner stone occupied, and they also knew what that position taught; therefore, the simple statement that the Redeemer of mankind would be a precious corner stone, at once enabled the people to understand that He would stand between the powers of darkness and the powers of light, and that His mission would be the noble, glorious and divine work of leading men from darkness to light; from ignorance to knowledge; from vice to virtue.

Masonry teaches that the corner stone must possess the most enduring qualities so that, after the building in which it is placed shall have crumbled and mouldered to dust, the corner stone may still be found. The enduring quality of the corner stone is symbolic of immortality. It teaches us that, although this house of our earthly tabernacle must sooner or later perish and become food for the

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